CLAIMS

1. A network interface device connectable to a network, the device being arranged to receive digital audio data representing an audio signal and to launch data packets representing the digital audio data onto the network, the device comprising:

an attribute detector arranged to generate attribute data representing an attribute of the audio signal; and

a packetiser operable:

- to format the digital audio data into audio data packets to be launched onto the network; and
- to format the attribute data into attribute data packets, separate from the audio data packets, to be launched onto the network.

2. A device according to claim 1, in which the attribute represents a level of the audio signal.

3. A device according to claim 1 or claim 2, being arranged to launch the audio data packets and the attribute data packets onto the network as separate respective multicast groups.

4. A device according to any one of claims 1 to 3, in which the attribute detector is arranged to generate attribute data representing the attribute at periodic intervals.

5. A device according to any one of the preceding claims, in which:

the digital audio data is associated with digital video data representing a video signal having a picture repetition period;

the attribute detector is arranged to generate the attribute data at least once in each successive picture repetition period.

6. A device according to claim 5, in which the picture repetition period is a frame repetition period.

7. A device according to claim 5, in which the picture repetition period is a field repetition period.

8. A device according to any one of claims 5 to 7, in which the digital video data is received by the device as part of an composite data stream carrying both the digital video data and the digital audio data.

9. A device according to claim 8;

comprising a data converter for converting the digital audio data of the composite data stream into separate digital audio data to be launched onto the network as audio data packets;

in which the packetiser is operable to format the digital video data into video data packets to be launched onto the network.

10. A device according to claim 8, in which the packetiser is operable to format the composite data stream into composite data packets to be launched onto the network.

11. A network destination device connectable to a network, the device being operable to receive audio data packets representing an audio signal and being operable to receive attribute data packets carrying attribute data representing an attribute of the audio signal; the device comprising a user interface arranged to provide a user indication representing a current value of the attribute data.

12. A device according to claim 11, in which the user interface comprises means for generating a visible indication, for display on a display screen, indicative of a current value of the attribute data.

13. A device according to claim 12, comprising a display screen.

14. A device according to any one of claims 11 to 13, in which the attribute data represents a level of the audio signal.

15. A device according to any one of claims 11 to 14, in which the attribute data represents values of the attribute at periodic intervals.

16. A device according to any one of claims 11 to 15, the device being selectively operable to receive the attribute data packets but not to receive the audio data packets.

17. A device according to any one of the preceding claims, the device being operable to launch the audio packets onto the network substantially in real time.

18. A data network comprising:
one or more devices according to any one of claims 1 to 10;
one or more devices according to any one of claims 11 to 16; and
a network providing data communication between the devices.

19. A network interface device connectable to a network and operable to receive a composite data stream carrying digital video data and digital audio data; the device comprising:

a data converter for converting the digital audio data of the composite data stream into separate digital audio data;

a packetiser is operable:

- to format at least the digital video data of the composite data stream into video data packets to be launched onto the network; and
- to format the separate digital audio data into audio data packets to be launched onto the network.

20. A device according to claim 19, in which the packetiser is operable to format the composite data stream into composite data packets to be launched onto the network.

21. A device according to claim 19 or claim 20, arranged to receive an AES audio stream; the packetiser being operable to format the separate digital audio data and the AES audio stream into audio data packets to be launched onto the network.

22. A method of operation of a network interface device connectable to a network, the device being arranged to receive digital audio data representing an audio signal and, substantially in real time, to launch data packets representing the digital audio data onto the network, the method comprising the steps of:

generating attribute data representing an attribute of the audio signal;

formatting the digital audio data into audio data packets to be launched onto the network; and

formatting the attribute data into attribute data packets, separate from the audio data packets, to be launched onto the network.

23. A method of operation of a network destination device connectable to a network, the device being operable to receive audio data packets representing an audio signal and being operable to receive attribute data packets carrying attribute data representing an attribute of the audio signal; the method comprising the step of:

providing a user indication representing a current value of the attribute data.

24. A method of operation of network interface device connectable to a network and operable to receive a composite data stream carrying digital video data and digital audio data; the method comprising the steps of:

converting the digital audio data of the composite data stream into separate digital audio data;

formatting at least the digital video data of the composite data stream into video data packets to be launched onto the network; and

formatting the separate digital audio data into audio data packets to be launched onto the network.

25. Computer software having program code for carrying out a method according to any one of claims 22 to 24.

26. A providing medium by which software according to claim 25 is provided.

27. A medium according to claim 26, the medium being a storage medium.

28. A medium according to claim 26, the medium being a transmission medium.

29. A data packet carrying data indicative of an attribute of a digital audio signal, the attribute being detected over a period longer than a sampling period of the digital audio signal.